THIS ISSUE: IRAN • The political cost of sanctions • Iran’s online war • Norouz • Shirazeh Houshiary • Veggiestan • The Hajj in London • Poetry • PLUS Reviews and events in London
About the London Middle East Institute (LMEI)

The London Middle East Institute (LMEI) draws upon the resources of London and SOAS to provide teaching, training, research, publication, consultancy, outreach and other services related to the Middle East. It serves as a neutral forum for Middle East studies broadly defined and helps to create links between individuals and institutions with academic, commercial, diplomatic, media or other specialisations.

With its own professional staff of Middle East experts, the LMEI is further strengthened by its academic membership – the largest concentration of Middle East expertise in any institution in Europe. The LMEI also has access to the SOAS Library, which houses over 150,000 volumes dealing with all aspects of the Middle East. LMEI’s Advisory Council is the driving force behind the Institute's fundraising programme, for which it takes primary responsibility. It seeks support for the LMEI generally and for specific components of its programme of activities.

Mission Statement:

The aim of the LMEI, through education and research, is to promote knowledge of all aspects of the Middle East including its complexities, problems, achievements and assets, both among the general public and with those who have a special interest in the region. In this task it builds on two essential assets. First, it is based in London, a city which has unrivalled contemporary and historical connections and communications with the Middle East including political, social, cultural, commercial and educational aspects. Secondly, the LMEI is closely linked to SOAS, the only tertiary educational institution in the world whose explicit purpose is to provide education and scholarship on the whole Middle East from prehistory until today.

LMEI Staff:

Director Dr Hassan Hakimian
Deputy Director and Company Secretary Dr Sarah Stewart
Executive Officer Louise Hosking
Events and Magazine Coordinator Vincenzo Paci-Delton

Disclaimer:

Opinions and views expressed in the Middle East in London are, unless otherwise stated, personal views of authors and do not reflect the views of their organisations nor those of the LMEI or the Editorial Board. Although all advertising in the magazine is carefully vetted prior to publication, the LMEI does not accept responsibility for the accuracy of claims made by advertisers.

Letters to the Editor:

Please send your letters to the editor at the LMEI address provided (see left panel) or email lmei@soas.ac.uk

Subscriptions:

To subscribe to The Middle East in London, please email lmei@soas.ac.uk to request subscription information and a form.
Contents

4 IRAN EDITORIAL

5 INSIGHT
The political cost of sanctions
Lord Norman Lamont

7 Iran’s online war
Azadeh Moaveni

9 Norouz
Rashna Writer

11 Iran Heritage Foundation
Armin Yavari

12 A window into the mind of an artist
Shirazeh Houshiary speaks about her work
Narguess Farzad

14 Veggiestan
Vegetables in Middle Eastern cuisine
Sally Butcher

16 Norouz around the world
Baquer Moin

18 POETRY
Mimi Khalvati and Qeysar Aminpour
selected and translated by Narguess Farzad

20 REVIEWS
Exhibition: The Hajj in London
Ionis Thompson

22 Film: Mourning
Mohammad Mirbashiri

23 Books in brief

24 OBITUARY
Alexander (Sandy) Morton
George Lane

25 EVENTS IN LONDON
Dear Reader

Narguess Farzad and Sarah Stewart

If you search newspaper headlines on Iran since the elections of 2009 they make for a grim read. So far this year, in January alone, little seems to have changed: Why Iran could start the next global recession (January 5), Iranian court sentences ‘CIA agent’ to death (January 9), Iran bans MPs from standing for re-election to parliament (January 10), Iran nuclear scientist killed in Tehran motorbike bomb attack (January 11), UK businessman loses extradition fight over alleged export of arms to Iran (January 13).

The Middle East in London this month goes some way to present another face of Iran, while not entirely overlooking the first. Our attention is drawn to the sober side of the current situation in Iran vis-à-vis the West by Lord Lamont’s analysis of the political cost of sanctions, while the writer and journalist Azadeh Moaveni explores the war waged by the Iranian government against its citizens’ use of the internet.

A magazine issue on Iran at this time of year would be incomplete without highlighting the Norouz festival of the New Year – a national day, with its roots in pre-Islamic Iran that today transcends geo-political boundaries. Iranians both religious and secular, as well as communities living in the ‘Persianate world’, celebrate Norouz in the various ways that it has evolved through the centuries, including in its most ancient and traditional forms. Both the historical and the contemporary approaches to this festival are outlined in this issue by Rashna Writer and Baqer Moin respectively.

Poetry, cinema and painting bear witness to the continued creative engagement with the arts by Iranians, whether living in Iran or abroad. The artistic contributions by Iranians in Britain are often viewed as a fusion of the two cultures. The accuracy of this assumption is considered in the interview with the painter and sculptor Shirazeh Houshiary and the work of the poet Mimi Khalvati.

As usual, the magazine offers an insight into the Middle Eastern love affair with its cuisine and the ritual preparation of food, whether for a special occasion or in a bustling market cafe. Sally Butcher looks at the history and rich variety of traditional vegetarian food from the region which has established its own place on the London culinary scene.

In the review section Ionis Thompson takes us behind the scenes of the much anticipated Hajj exhibition at the British Museum, which gives a comprehensive, visual account of the journey, the rituals and what it means for those who have undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca. All other forthcoming Middle East related programmes are as usual listed in the Events in London section.

It is with immense sadness that we mark the death of Sandy Morton with an obituary by George Lane. Sandy will long be remembered at SOAS and beyond with great affection and held in high esteem for his contribution to many fields of Persian studies. A memorial service will be held for him at St George’s Bloomsbury on February 9 at 4pm, followed by a reception. Further details will be posted on the LMEI website.
Relations between Iran and the West have recently entered a new highly dangerous phase with Iranian talk of blocking the Straits of Hormuz. This comes after the ransacking of the British Embassy and Iranian tests of new missiles. The Iranian regime has also become increasingly repressive; more political prisoners, executions and show-trials. Many people will conclude it is hopeless trying to negotiate with Iran. But is that a correct analysis?

The latest spat has been caused by the threat to impose sanctions on Iran’s Central Bank. Britain and the USA have already done this and France is urging the EU to follow. This will make it more difficult for Iran to receive payment for its oil exports. Given the massive dependency of Iran on oil, this sanction has been regarded by the Islamic Republic as an attempt to bring the economy and country to complete collapse. It is difficult to argue that sanctioning the Central Bank is a targeted measure that will have no effect on the general population.

The new sanctions followed the IAEA report on Iran’s nuclear programme which voiced ‘increasing concern’ and highlighted possible areas of weapons-related work. But reaction to the report was not unanimous and divided along predictable lines with support from those already wanting more sanctions and scepticism expressed by others as to whether the report contained anything new.

Sanctions are creating a freak economy with ever more state control. They hit the private sector rather than the public, and small firms rather than large

Lord Norman Lamont discusses why economic sanctions against Iran are fuelling instability in both domestic policy and international relations
Behind the nuclear issue lies the fear of Israel, alarmed by the rhetoric of President Ahmadinejad. But Ehud Barak, the former Prime Minister and Meir Dagan, the former head of Mossad, have said that Iran does not necessarily pose an ‘existential threat’ to Israel. What a nuclear Iran could do is seriously curtail Israel’s ability to take military action against its Arab neighbours.

The danger of the present situation can hardly be overstated. There seems little reason for optimism without a sharp change in direction by either or both sides. The European Union, with Britain in the lead, has followed the United States in a policy which seems unlikely to produce the desired results. The carrot and stick approach has been tried so often before with Iran and has repeatedly failed. Why should it be any different this time?

This is not to say that sanctions have had no effect. The Iranian riyal has collapsed, there are deep problems in the banking system, businessmen cannot get imports, inflation is much higher than officially stated and unemployment, particularly among the young, is rising. Much of this is due to management of the economy. Sanctions undoubtedly have had an effect but that is different from producing the desired political change.

Sanctions are creating a freak economy with ever more state control. They hit the private sector rather than the public, and small firms rather than large. Many firms are driven into bankruptcy or the arms of para-state organisations. Short of supplies, firms ally themselves with those who can smuggle goods, usually the Revolutionary Guards. The regime promotes tortuous measures of import substitution and is happy to preach ‘self-sufficiency’ recalling as it does so, the glory of the state of siege during the Iraq War.

Iran is not North Korea. It is a lively cosmopolitan country whose people travel freely in and out. The policy of the West increasingly seems to cut Iran off from contact with the outside world to make it like a greater Gaza. But, of course, Iran is far too big a country to be so locked up. What purpose is served by refusing a leading Iranian film-maker a visa to come to the UK or refusing airlines, travelling legally to Iran, permission to refuel at Heathrow? The regime may be unattractive but cutting it off from the outside world only helps it.

Iran will use sanctions and threats from abroad as an excuse to increase repression. Iran will use sanctions and threats from abroad as an excuse to increase repression, just as, with greater reason, it used the invasion by Iraq as a reason to clamp down. Some doubt whether the Islamic Republic would have survived were it not for the war. Similarly, any military attack on Iran would help the Islamic leadership regain its lost legitimacy and might not be entirely unwelcome.

In the UK, we have learned over a long period of time that the ‘Irish problem’ was deeply rooted in history and we decided to negotiate with people we regarded as extremists. The West seems unable to see that the problem between Iran and the West goes back a long way. The United States is ‘The Great Satan’ but Britain is its oldest enemy. Iran made several attempts at democracy which were snuffed out by Britain and the US: the 1906 revolution and the 1953 coup against Mossadegh. There are most of all, bitter memories of the West’s support for Saddam Hussein during the national trauma of the Iraq war which led to at least 125,000 to 200,000 dead Iranians. When Iran tried to draw the world’s attention to Saddam’s use of WMD (chemical weapons), the West and the UN turned a blind eye.

The United States has a tendency to see the hand of Iran everywhere. When Saddam Hussein gassed the Kurds at Halabja, the first reaction of the State Department was to blame Iran. The United States also blamed Iran for the unrest in Bahrain in 2011 even though no evidence has ever been produced.

The Islamic Republic may be theocratic domestically but in its foreign policy it has been motivated more by national interest than religion. Iran extradites Chechin Muslim fighters back to Russia. Iran has a close partnership with neighbouring Christian Armenia. There is no evidence that Iran has territorial designs on any country in the Middle East, and it has repeatedly rejected accusations that it has any on Bahrain. Most strikingly, Iran gave assistance to America when it invaded Afghanistan, but its only reward was being dubbed the ‘Axis of Evil’.

Iran has plenty of reasons to feel nervous about its own security with US troops, until recently, stationed in two of its neighbouring countries, and a strong US naval presence still off its coast. Iranian paranoia is fed by politicians like Newt Gingrich, calling for ‘deniable covert operations’ in Iran combined with ‘targeted assassinations’. To the Iranians, that must already seem to be happening, with nuclear scientists being mysteriously murdered in the street.

The West is pressing Iran on the one issue that unites much Iranian public opinion. If Iran is to be coaxed towards further cooperation with the IAEA and abandoning any nuclear weapons research, it will only be on the basis of negotiations aimed more widely than the nuclear issue. These will have to take account of Iran’s own security concerns and what it sees as its rightful place in the region. The leadership of Iran may be increasingly repressive, but that does not mean that we could not negotiate with them just as the US did with China, despite the latter’s human rights record. The West may find it needs to try a new approach.

Lord Lamont of Lerwick is Chairman of the British Iranian Chamber of Commerce and is a former Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The IAEA Forum on the Middle East as a nuclear-weapon-free zone, 2011
When the Iranian government cracked down in the aftermath of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s contested 2009 re-election, it did so with almost cinematic vividness. The iconic scenes of the uprising – the shooting of Neda Agha Soltan on a Tehran street, the baton assaults on kerchiefed matrons and fashionable, green-clad teenagers – grabbed and held the world’s attention. But while mobile phone footage of those moments created a first draft of history composed in YouTube, much of the regime’s response unfolded invisibly.

In the weeks following the demonstrations that came to be known as the Green Movement, government censors and hackers sought out their opponents online. The blocking of Twitter and Facebook caught the Western media’s attention, but these sites, while highly useful to small circles of activists, were never the government’s primary targets. Instead, the regime systematically began tracing and targeting individual bloggers it deemed as supporters of the American-Israeli ‘fetna’ (sedition) it believed was behind the unrest.

The government had aggressively controlled internet access and expression for years, slowing down connection speeds, blocking websites and ‘un-Islamic’ search terms, and harassing bloggers. But the election unrest in 2009 prompted the regime to adopt new means of online repression altogether. Within weeks, the campaign knocked hundreds of blogs offline, threatening to close down the free-wheeling, voluminous public salon known as the Iranian blogosphere – the last space where Iranians could exchange ideas with relative freedom, and practise the engaged, critical mindset that had flourished within the country itself during previous, brief periods of political openness.

Activists, journalists, and scholars inside Iran were shaken by the crackdown, nervous that the 2009 unrest had fundamentally altered the regime’s tolerance for online debate. Despite its harsh treatment of activists and critics in daily life, the government had been surprisingly generous with the content it permitted online. Before 2009, about 80-90 per cent of secular or reformist-minded blogs were visible, according to a study by Harvard’s Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

For a brief period following the 2009 unrest, the state’s campaign to limit opposition discourse by hounding individual bloggers appeared successful. The democratic-minded, secular Iranians whose presence had lent the blogosphere its impressive diversity seemed endangered.
Iranians in France protest in support of democracy in Iran, 2009

As the regime’s anxiety mounts in the run up to parliamentary elections, security forces are widening their control of the internet, hoping to stave off potential unrest

peaked in 2010, energised by the challenge posed by the Green Movement and the periodic street unrest that followed. Its decline, however, is harder to explain.

The simplest answer would be to draw conclusions from a timeline: with the Green Movement itself extinguished (or lying quietly under the embers, depending on one’s feelings), militant, Basij-connected bloggers no longer feel as compelled to exert themselves. But the ideological worldview of the Basij, and that of the hard-line clerics it follows, holds that Iran is culturally besieged at all times by the existence of secular, westernised Iranians who would turn the country into Turkey overnight if given a chance. And with Iran facing a European oil embargo and mounting pressure over its nuclear programme, the country seems more vulnerable and isolated by the day. Hardly the time for the nation’s most fervid defenders, as the Basij view themselves, to become distracted.

If the militia’s name, Basij, literally means mobilisation, one reason for the contracting online activity might be that mobilisation just isn’t happening. If local commanders are not pushing online duties at weekly meetings, the absence of clear directives or cash incentives could mean that Basiji youth are reverting to their organic offline behaviour. Most young Basijis hail from poorer backgrounds, and many would not tend to have personal computers and internet connections at home; blogging would involve the discipline of regular trips to cybercafes and the effort of producing original or retrieving scripted content. Without regular remuneration, only the most zealous Basij members would keep up their labours.

The Cyber Army may be relaxing its contributions to the blogosphere, but as the regime’s anxiety mounts in the run up to parliamentary elections in March, security forces are widening their control of the internet and targeting users again, hoping to stave off potential unrest. The March 2 election will be the first major vote in Iran since 2009’s contested election, and the authorities are preparing a ‘readiness’ to warn university students and opposition supporters from turning out in protest.

To that end, the Cyber Police, formed in 2011 and comprising tens of thousands of members across Iran’s multiple security arms, announced a new clampdown in early January on internet expression. The new measures decreed that all customers using internet cafes must provide their name, address, and national ID numbers, and require cybercafe owners to log customers’ browsing history and install CCTV cameras to monitor users.

The new rules have coincided with Iran’s announcement that its ‘halal’ internet initiative – a domestic intranet that would provide a virtual buffer between Iranians and the polluted, un-Islamic culture of the global internet – will go live by early February. The ‘halal’ internet, designed to eventually replace citizens’ access to the internet altogether, is the regime’s most ambitious attempt to control access to online information. Officials describe it as a parallel system for ordinary Iranians, and have said that only government ministries, banks, and major businesses with official or commercial duties would be permitted access to the global internet.

With the country’s key parliamentary vote around the corner, these measures underscore the regime’s fears of street unrest and renewed protest. But they also reflect its more profound nervousness around the internet itself, and its awareness that its many layers of repression and control have not achieved their goals. Despite vast expenditure, the government hasn’t managed to prevent Iranians from accessing the Western and global culture they crave; it has failed effectively to block the online tools they use to organise and document protests; and its state-funded Basij blogs have gone ignored by the mainstream blogosphere. It remains to be seen whether the national intranet will finally turn around this string of failures, or simply be another feeble attempt to control a tidal wave with a sink plug.

Azadeh Moaveni is a former Middle East correspondent for Time magazine and has reported on Iran since 1999. She is the author of Lipstick Jihad, Honeymoon in Tehran and co-author, with Shirin Ebadi, of Iran Awakening
Among the most auspicious days in the calendar of Iranian peoples and their descendants is March 21, Norouz – the Persian New Year – which has come to symbolise the Iranian peoples, and harks back to when Iran was Zoroastrian. Indeed, the antiquity of Norouz is integral to Persian mythology. We are told that the mythical King Jamshid, blessed with farr-i izadi (Divine Glory) ruled the world during a golden age which will once again be restored at the end of time; while the Zoroastrian tradition informs us that the festival was founded by Zarathustra himself who, it is held, received his revelation on Norouz. Zarathustra is thought to have imposed only two obligations on his followers: the individual one of praying five times daily, and the communal celebration of the seven seasonal festivals.

The seven high feasts are dedicated to the creator, Ahura Mazda, and the seven creations, the Amesha Spentas. These Holy Immortals perform a dual role. They form the kernel of the ethical infrastructure of the Zoroastrian doctrine, and are the guardians and protectors of the seven good creations: Sky, Water, Earth, Plants, Cattle, Man and Fire. The 7th festival is the last convivial occasion of the old year and marks the start of the New Year, and hence came to be known later as Norouz, the 'New Day'. Springtime in the cycle of life is an important period as it represents the annual resurgence of life. As such, it is deemed to be a day of renewal, hope and joy. Pahlavi texts, dating to the Sasanian dynasty (224

A sense of renewal is characteristic of Norouz celebrations, and celebrating the Frashegird is essentially a joyous occasion.
The making of Frashegird is like the year, in which at springtime the trees are made to blossom... Like the resurrection of the dead, new leaves are made to shoot from dry plants and trees, and springtime is made to blossom. (Zadspram XXXIV. 0.27)

A sense of renewal is characteristic of Norouz celebrations, and celebrating the Frashegird is essentially a joyous occasion. New clothes, music, food all play their part. A reference from a text believed to date from the Parthian era (247 BCE-224 CE), Vis u Ramin paints a picture:

‘Though the king’s banquet was splendid, others were no less so... Everyone had gone from his house to the country... From every garden, field and river a different variety of music charmed the ear.’ (Vis u Ramin, 20).

And it was the custom, as much in times long past as it remains to this day, to sow for this 7th feast seven kinds of seeds, to come up fresh and green on Norouz itself:

‘For the king the sight of growing barley was particularly deemed a blessing... And the harvest (of these green shoots) was never gathered but with songs and music and mirth.’

This is the genesis of the Haft Sin table, so emblematic of Norouz itself, composed of the seven ‘S’s’ in the Persian alphabet. Each family dresses its Haft Sin table to correspond to the seven Amesha Spentas. In addition, a few coins representing prosperity, a basket of painted eggs for fertility, candles for enlightenment, a flask of rose water known for its magical power, a prayer book and a picture of the Prophet Zarathustra, in Zoroastrian homes, adorn the table.

The small group of Zoroastrians domiciled in India and known as the Parsis, have for generations celebrated ‘Jamschidi Norouz’ in their distinctive way. The day begins with a visit to the fire temple, before which the family has breakfasted on ravo, semolina pudding, followed by a typically ‘auspicious’ lunch of rice, dar and fish patia. While the Parsis do not prepare a Haft Sin table, the sesh, a silver tray is dressed with a container of rose water, betel nut, a handful of raw rice, sugar, flowers, a picture of Zarathustra, and an afargania, the silver urn which holds a small fire nourished by sandalwood and other fragrant resins.

While variations in the celebration of Norouz may have occurred among peoples of Iran dispersed by time and place, the durability of the festival itself is remarkable. The central role of Norouz in Iranian peoples’ affections meant that following the introduction of Islam to Iran, from the 7th CE century, the new rulers found they could not dislodge this essentially Zoroastrian celebration. In fact, Norouz was honoured even by the early founders of Islam; there are records of the four Great Caliphs presiding over Norouz celebrations, and Norouz came to be adopted as the main royal holiday during the Abbasid era. Following the demise of the Caliphate, the subsequent elevation and re-emergence of Persian dynasties, especially the Saminids and Buyys, elevated Norouz to a higher level. The Buyids revived the ancient traditions of Sasanian times, and restored many smaller celebrations that had been eliminated by the Caliphate. Even the Turkish and Mongol invaders of Iran did not attempt to abolish Norouz in favour of any other celebration, which helps explains the totemic significance of the great celebration, which is more widespread than is generally believed. Countries that were once territories of, or influenced by, the Persian Empire, ranging from Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Uighurs in north-western China, all have their distinctive Norouz celebration to welcome the spring equinox on March 21.

What began essentially as a celebration of the Zoroastrian year, associated with the 7th creation of Fire, which in turn is linked to Asha Vahista (Best Truth), a festival celebrated by Iran’s monarchs and their subjects, came to be so rooted in the affections of the Iranian nation that it was impossible to dislodge from the calendar. Indeed, the genius of Norouz, as we know it, is the universality and secularity of its message – man’s aim of Frasho-kereti of the good creation, symbolised by the spring equinox, marking the end of winter and the refreshing of the season.

Rashna Writer is a Senior Teaching Fellow in the Department of Religions at SOAS
Based in London, Iran Heritage Foundation (IHF) is a leading supporter of Iranian and Persian studies in the world today. A UK-registered, non-political charity, it is dedicated to enhancing awareness and recognition of Iran’s culture and history, and helping celebrate, preserve and advance the diversity of languages, traditions, arts, literature and achievements of Iran and the Persian world.

The Foundation interprets its remit broadly and actively facilitates and initiates a wide range of programmes both in the academic sphere and the public. During its 16 years, it has organised or supported 53 conferences, 52 multi disciplinary events and exhibitions, and 72 film and performing arts festivals and events. In 2001, the Foundation organised the first-ever major exhibition of contemporary Iranian art in Europe, while in 2005 and 2009, it partnered the British Museum for the exhibitions Forgotten Empire: The World of Ancient Persia and Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran both of which featured loans facilitated by IHF, including artefacts never before displayed outside Iran. Marking the Foundation’s tenth anniversary in 2005 also were the critically acclaimed Forest Without Leaves installation, Trees in Snow exhibition, film retrospective, workshop and conference on Abbas Kiarostami at the V & A Museum. More recently, the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge played host to an impressive collection of Persian miniatures in its Epic of the Persian Kings: The Art of Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh exhibition (supported by IHF) as did the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin, which celebrated the millennium of the Shahnameh with its own comprehensive display. Moreover, Iran Heritage Foundation’s commitment to the provision of public lectures delivered by world-class experts continues apace with recent topics including 16th century manuscripts from Shiraz, the literature of Forough Farrokhzad, Persian poetry and the Shahnameh.

Since the Foundation’s inception in 1995, it has left an indelible imprint on the fields of Iranian and Persian studies and in the promotion of Persian culture through a worldwide collaborative effort with many eminent cultural and educational institutions. IHF is widely considered as the partner of choice for many museums, libraries and universities when it comes to the planning and execution of projects and programmes related to the Persianate world. A clear indication of this is the rapid growth of the Foundation’s landmark Institutional Partnerships Programme (or IPP). The Institutional Partnerships Programme provides much needed support for fellowships, teaching positions and research centres dedicated to Iranian studies at respected academic institutions. It also underwrites curatorships in Iranian art at major cultural institutions. As funding for such programmes has suffered significant reductions in recent years, Iran Heritage Foundation’s support through its IPPs has become a vital means of sustaining Iranian studies and arts in the UK and abroad. Current partners include the universities of Cambridge, Edinburgh and St Andrews, the British Library, the Freer Gallery of Art, the British Museum and the V & A.

The Foundation’s pioneering digitisation initiatives mark another area of activity. They include the Golha Project, which has created a free online database containing the complete archive of all 1,616 Golha radio programmes produced between 1956 and 1979, a veritable encyclopaedia of classical Persian poetry and music while at the British Library, a full-time curator has been recruited to catalogue and digitise the Persian manuscripts in its collections, which total over 10,000.

This year, the Foundation is delighted to announce that it has established SOAS as one of its IPPs. Home to the Centre for Iranian Studies, this partnership will build on a long-standing collaborative relationship that began with the ground breaking exhibition Royal Persian Paintings: The Qajar Epoch 1785–1925 in 1999. Two four-monthly visiting fellowships will be awarded per annum to a scholar of any discipline within Iranian and Persian studies.

Armin Yavari is research assistant at IHF

To mark the commencement of the IHF-SOAS Institutional Partnership, The Middle East in London has invited Armin Yavari to summarise the Foundation’s activities.
St Martin-in-the-Fields, the magnificent 18th century baroque church dominating the north-east corner of Trafalgar Square, is not only famous for its association with soldiers returning from the First World War, but also for its outstanding efforts to bring hope and practical help to the homeless. More recently, its sunken courtyard and the cafe in the crypt have also become a hip central London venue for meeting friends or enjoying free lunchtime concerts and evenings of jazz. Once in a while, on my way from SOAS to the British Institute of Persian Studies, I drop into the shop below the glass pavilion but it had been years since I had actually gone inside the church. A while ago I decided to walk up the portico and into the church itself and quite unexpectedly, I was greeted by the most poignant and yet uplifting sight: the east window, newly designed, by the Iranian-born artist, Shirazeh Houshiary.

Somewhere in the back of my mind I recalled the press coverage about the controversy surrounding the re-design of the window and the choice of artist. Most of the uproar seemed to have died down prior to the unveiling of it in early 2008. Looking up at the window that day, the late morning light poured through the simple yet finely crafted lattice work of stainless steel and submerged the altar below in a sea of radiance. I was overwhelmed not just by the powerful beauty of the piece but also by a sense of pride that the window was designed by an Iranian artist. Houshiary’s contemporary composition of colourless ‘stained glass’ for St Martin-in-the-Fields is unquestionably a piece of religious art. The spacing between the warps and wefts of steel trellis at the centre of the frame is reduced, drawing the eye immediately to the unmistakable presence of a cross, where, nestling at its heart is a central ellipse, gently leaning, evoking the vulnerable tilt of the head of Christ. But it would be limiting to call the piece just a work of Christian art, as it speaks equally to the longing of mankind for a soothing invocation of tranquility, regardless of adherence to any particular

I like to fragment the surfaces and capture the essence of life that cannot be pinned down, just as water, which has no form and no colour
Looking
show
years, her works have been exhibited in the
Tony Cragg and Anish Kapoor. Over the
working in Britain in the 1980s, including
Shirazeh was established at the forefront
Cardiff College of Art. It was not long before
of Art and became a junior fellow at the
Britain she studied at the Chelsea School
Iranian city of Shiraz. After moving to
Houshiary was born in 1955 in the
of the younger generation of sculptors
in Britain in the 1980s, including
Tony Cragg and Anish Kapoor. Over the
years, her works have been exhibited in the
Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of
Looking at The Museum of Modern Art in
New York in 2006, as well as in exhibitions
throughout the world, most recently at the
Lisson Gallery in London. Houshiary was
shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1994
and was awarded the title Professor at the
London Institute in 1997. She has been
living and working in London for more
than three and half decades.
Her work has always contained a
distinctive spiritual edge and critics have
suggested that her art is strongly influenced
by Persian mysticism and culture. To find
out more about her work and inspirations,
I contacted her. Knowing how fiercely
she protects her privacy I was not certain
that she would agree to meet me and
was delighted when she got in touch and
suggested that I visit her at her studio.

While making tentative small talk over
I tried to tease out some connections
between our shared early Iranian
upbringings but realised at once that
looking for familiar Persian or Islamic
signposts to her work would not get me very
far and would be a very limiting approach
to understanding the expression of her ideas.
Indeed, when I suggested that she is one of
the most successful Iranian artists of all
time, she protested that she has an intense
dislike of labels and subjective limitations,
and added: ‘being labelled an Iranian
imposes an immediate boundary on me and
my work. I am a citizen of this earth and I
hope my work transcends national, cultural
and religious stereotypes.’

I suggested to Houshiary that artists
who have left their homelands and live
abroad surely take with them attachments
and memories that, although over time
fuse with their surroundings, will always
reveal the cultural DNA of the artist. By
way of illustration I pointed to the fact
that many of her paintings and sculptures
exude a sense of spirituality reflected in
non-vocal chants and spiralling movements.
Houshiary reflected that her father often
said one should not fight one’s genes but she
suggested that the word spiritual has been
‘abused’. She reiterated that her concerns
are ‘human’ and if her attempts to ‘unveil
the invisible’ are reminiscent of the poetry
of Rumi, for example, it is because there is
an agitation and frenzy that informs both.
‘My paintings have shimmering surfaces
and rather than presenting a sense of
solidity they seem as if they are evaporating,
depicting a sense of motion and breathing.
I like to fragment the surfaces and capture
the essence of life that cannot be pinned
down, just as water, which has no form and
no colour but can take any form and any
colour. As if to say the indefinable is life
itself.’

Some of the most exquisite paintings by
Houshiary are large, abstract layers of text,
often consisting of just two words, written
deliberately repeatedly and crushed together,
and then taken apart and reassembled,
in white, red or blue graphite pencil on
black or white aquacryl, creating an illusion
of a diaphanous veil or fine chain-mail
quivering and vibrating on the canvas and
evaporating at the edges. The unmistakable
spirit of movement and the sense of
respiratory expansion and contraction are
also a feature of Houshiary’s sculptures.
Many are made of a combination of solid
and hollow metallic bricks, layered in a slow
dance of movement, held together with
no visible adhesive. She is also continuing
work on a series of video animations that
she began in 2003. I told Houshiary I was
exhausted just listing the media she works
in and trying to count the number of her
recent works. Leaning back in her chair,
she fixed me with her gentle, dark eyes
and said: ‘I am fortunate to be an artist. I
am passionate about art and have worked
hard at it — but it is just like love; an all
consuming, visceral love that fulfils my life’,
and lest we assume that hers has been an
effortless journey, she adds: ‘I have gone to
hell and back to be where I am today’.

A few days after the interview, I returned
to St Martin-in-the-Fields to look again
at Houshiary’s creation. It more than
adequately accomplishes its brief: ‘to
successfully animate the light’. Whether
it annoys Shirazeh Houshiary or not, I
cannot help having felt an inch or two taller
as I observed the expression of delight
and wonder on the faces of other visitors,
and basked in an immense sense of pride
that the artist stirring such emotions is an
Iranian.

Narguess Farzad is a member of the MEL
Editorial Board
I am sipping black tea in Abu Zaad, the rather excellent restaurant owned and run by the Damas Gate mini-empire in Shepherd’s Bush. I want to know how it is that they make the best ful medames in town. I am slightly anxious, as the place is thronging with a pleasant mix of Arab families and locals ‘in the know’, and I am aware that the last thing a hard-working chef usually wants during service is to come and talk to a gauche food writer. To my surprise the chef agrees to answer my questions. After a lot of fun-but-unhelpful smiling and hand waving, it quickly becomes obvious that we need a translator, and so before long the head waiter, kitchen porter and a random man standing at the takeaway counter have all joined me at my rather small (but beautifully laid) table.

‘Tell me, if you would be so kind, how you make your ful medames. Would you share your secret recipe?’ I am writing a cook book....

A flurry of rapid Arabic ensues. My pristine note-pad (which is for show as I rarely take notes) is seized, and a recipe of sorts starts to emerge. After a lot of crossing out and apparent disagreement, the pad is put back in front of me, bearing a complete and surprisingly legible recipe. And some smeared tomato puree.

‘Chef Ismail Abou Basel would like to know more about your book,’ says the head waiter.

‘Well, it’s vegetarian. And Middle Eastern,’ I smile.

‘What, with no meat in it?’ Consternation all round the table. Someone translates for chef Ismail. He removes his chef’s hat and scratches his head.

‘Not even a little bit of meat?’ he asks, in perfect English.

‘the secret is bicarbonate of soda, by the way: it helps the fuls achieve perfect tenderness

VEGGIESTAN. Literally: land of the vegetables. There is of course no such word, and no such country. ‘-stan’ is a common Persian suffix, and is applied to all sorts of nations, both physical and conceptual – England (England, of course), Arabistan (all of the Arab lands put together), kohestan (any mountainous territory) or (perhaps most alluringly) gulistan (a rose garden). It is not a term that would necessarily spring to mind when describing the Middle East. For that is loosely the area which it is designed to conjure – the band leading from Morocco in the west across to Kashmir, and from the tip of Yemen to the northernmost point of Kazakhstan. The concept of vegetarianism may not actually be an anathema to the residents of the region, but it is certainly a puzzle to most of them. The world’s first form of animal farming (sheep, since you ask) started in the area we roughly know as Kurdistan today. Meat is both embedded in their cuisine (the use of allyah – fat from fat-tailed sheep – is subsiding a little, but if you look at al-Baghdadi’s Kitab al-Tabikh even vegetable recipes begin with a generous scoop of the stuff) and a luxury that cannot always be afforded. Many dishes that are now perceived as more or less vegetarian (soups, casseroles) were originally devised as a way of making a little meat (bones) stretch a long way. So it is hard for Middle Easterners such as our Syrian chef friend to grasp the idea of a life without meat; when something is a hard-won commodity, and times are difficult, why would one choose to eschew it?

Sally Butcher discusses the variety for vegetable lovers to be found in Middle Eastern cuisine

It is a well known fact that houmous holds the fabric of the vegetarian space-time continuum together
It is of course also true that some of the world’s most fabulous vegetable creations come out of Veggiestan. It is a well-known fact that houmous holds the fabric of the vegetarian space-time continuum together. Without it the vegetarian race would face a grim existence: what else could they possibly put in their sandwiches or stick their crudités in? And what about falafel? Tabouleh? Baba Ghanoush? Like many cuisines that have not entirely evolved beyond their own borders, cooking remains in many ways simple and unfussy, although I defy any chef to make perfect kibbeh (Levantine croquettes) or Persian pulao (posh rice) without at least five years’ practice. Vegetables, pulses and grains are not played with, overcooked, preened and fanned into silly shapes: they are prepared in a way that preserves both their innate goodness and their unique flavour. Nowhere is this more obvious than with the concept of mezze (which is derived from the Persian word mazeh meaning ‘taste’). Ingredients are cooked simply, seasoned and served: steamed, salted artichokes, sautéed aubergines or peppers in olive oil, beans stewed gently with onions and herbs. Plain, perfect food. Even with the more complex mezze classics – dips and dolmeh for example – it is the vegetarian elements that are allowed to do all the talking.

Persian home-cooking is largely built on the concept of the khoresh – a stew (literally ‘sauce’) of meat and vegetables. But so full is the flavour of the herbs, spices, vegetables and fruit therein that usually the meat element pales into the background. These dishes are easy to recreate without meat, and are a rich source of new ideas for the adventurous vegetarian (or cookbook writer). Veggiestan’s street food is also an eye-opener for those used to over-cooked and unimaginative veg. There is more to the region than doner and shish kebabs. Think boiled salted turnips, flame-grilled corn-cobs, spiced broad beans still steaming in their pods and any number of fresh, green nuts. Want something more fanciful? Try bourregi (little Turkish pies) or boulanee (little Afghan pies), or any number of warming lentil soups (every country has one).

A surprising irony is the fact that Muslim Veggiestanis in the diaspora have really rather a lot in common with vegetarians; in the aisles of Western supermarkets they are thrown together. Both are to be found anxiously checking ingredients looking for hidden gelatine, dripping or animal rennet, and Muslims eating out in this country usually opt for vegetarian food as it is the easiest choice.

A vegetarian travelling in Veggiestan may in fact struggle to find food that is entirely devoid of meat (stock, fat etc). But a vegetarian looking to the nations comprising Veggiestan for inspiration will be richly rewarded.

Sally Butcher and her Persian husband Jamshid run a Persian corner shop, Persepolis, in Peckham. Veggiestan (Pavillion) is her second cookery book.

If you want a taster of Veggiestan, or indeed Persia in general, Persepolis holds regular ‘pop-up’ restaurant evenings at Anderson & Co in Peckham. Telephone 020 7469 7078 for details, or check on the Persepolis website: foratasteofpersia.co.uk. For recipes from Veggiestan at home, go to: veggiestan.com

© Yuki Sugura

Vegetables, pulses and grains are not played with, overcooked, preened and fanned into silly shapes: they are prepared in a way that preserves both their innate goodness and their unique flavour
Some 300 million people, from western China, Central and West Asia to the Balkans and other communities worldwide, celebrate Norouz ‘new day’ – the spring equinox – an event that has achieved greater significance in political and cultural diplomacy since the 1980s.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a search for cultural and historical identity by its Islamic republics, which were emerging for the first time as independent nation states. Peoples of these republics had celebrated Norouz secretly, despite the official ban. In the post-independent era, Norouz gradually became a national holiday, to the extent that most of these republics now celebrate both January 1 and March 21 (spring equinox) as their new years. For some, such as in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan, Norouz is more important than the western New Year.

For Iranians, Norouz has always been the main Eid (festival), far more important than religious Eids. When the monarchy ruled Iran, Norouz was the only occasion when schools and universities were closed for two weeks and the country came to a standstill. This trend has so far continued. Recent attempts to curtail these holidays and to give more prominence to the religious occasions have not been a great success.

The Islamic Republic has an uneasy relationship with Iranian nationalism. The word melli (national) was banned for several years, and replaced by an Islamic term. The National Consultative Assembly was renamed the Islamic Consultative Assembly. The National Iranian Airline was renamed Islamic Republic Airline and there are many other examples. However, when the authorities discovered that people respond better to the government if it appeals to their sense of nationalism, in particular towards the end of the Iran-Iraq war, melli was rehabilitated in the media. The ambiguities remained, and attempts by political hardliners and religious conservatives to denigrate Norouz as a ‘pagan practice’ never ceased.

However, hardliners’ campaigns against national cultural symbols had the opposite effect. Helped by social networking sites, the Iranian youth, eager for meaning and joy in their lives, are presently waging an intensified campaign to revive national symbols. They began to celebrate Yalda, the eve of the Winter Solstice, and Mehrgan, the autumnal equinox.

If celebrating Norouz divides the ruling establishment, taking advantage of the popularity of national symbols...
Since 2009, President Obama has used the event to demonstrate a better understanding of the Iranian people and their culture and sentiments for political and electoral gains has also divided them. While the more conservative elements play down nationalism, populist politicians surrounding the president, such as Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, have sparked controversy by talking about the Maktab-e Irani or the Iranian school of Islam, thus distancing themselves from the conservatives and their attitude towards the Iranian national heritage. In 2011, as a vote-winning exercise, the president and his allies planned a major celebration for Norouz at Persepolis, where the former Shah once held a celebration commemorating 2,500 years of the monarchy. The conservative media waged a major anti-Norouz campaign to discredit the presidential advisers, such as Mr Rahim Mashaei. They were forced to cancel this celebration publicly although it did occur in private.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban and some Mujahedin parties played down Norouz. Following the fall of the Taliban, the picture changed. The good fortune of Norouz and, to a lesser extent, that of Mehrgan has been revived. Hundreds of thousands of people are now travelling from all over the country to celebrate the new year in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The Kurds have always celebrated Norouz. Since the fall of Saddam Hussein, Kurdish authorities in northern Iraq have held major festivals and official processions. Across the border, the Kurds in Turkey have also traditionally celebrated the event. Turkish administrations have often opposed the celebrations, considering them signs of Kurdish nationalism. The PKK, the cessationist Kurdish group, used Norouz to further its cause.

Faced with this ever-increasing Kurdish campaign, and the celebrations by the newly independent Turkic nations in the Caucasus and central Asia, the Turkish government changed its position. Not only did it proclaim Norouz as an ancient heritage of the Turkic people but many of its leaders also joined the festivities, including jumping over the symbolically purifying fire. In 2009, the Turkish government began special television services during Norouz for all Turkic-speaking countries as a sign of solidarity and to share the celebrations.

The migration of millions of Persians, Afghans, Kurds and other ethnic groups in the past few decades to the West has brought the festivities associated with Norouz to the heart of western societies. It is celebrated in educational institutions demonstrating its importance to western politicians. Many western leaders and lawmakers are increasingly acknowledging Norouz, whether for social or electoral reasons. Since 2009, President Obama has used the event to demonstrate a better understanding of Iranian people and their culture. In his first message, addressed to Iranians, he said: ‘this holiday is both an ancient ritual and a moment of renewal. Within these celebrations lies the promise of a new day, the promise of opportunity for our children, security for our families, progress for our communities, and peace between nations.’

On March 19 2009, the US House of Representatives recognised the cultural and historical significance of Norouz in a resolution stating: 'Norouz originated in ancient Persia, harkens the departure from the trials and tribulations of the previous year and brings hope for the New Year; embodies the tradition that each individual’s thinking, speaking, and conduct should always be virtuous, and the ideal of compassion for our fellow human beings regardless of ethnicity or religion, and symbolises a time of renewal and community.' Canada has also recognised Norouz as a special day, as has Sweden.

This new international awareness is coupled with UNESCO putting Norouz in the list of intangible cultural heritages of humanity, a move proposed by the Republic of Azerbaijan. It was later recognised as the International Day of Norouz by the UN General Assembly, calling on member states that celebrate the festival to study its history and traditions with a view to disseminating knowledge about it among the international community and organising annual commemorative events.

Coincidentally, most nations who celebrate Norouz are members of the ECO (Economic Co-operation Organisation), an intergovernmental body of the central and west Asian states. The ECO was set up to promote cultural and economic co-operation, though it has had little success in the field of culture. A regional and international interest in Norouz has given the ECO inspiration to focus on a shared, secular cultural heritage. The ECO member states have agreed to be the official host of Norouz on rotation. Last year was Iran’s turn. The heads of states that visited Tehran last year witnessed a sombre occasion as they were not allowed to celebrate the occasion at Persepolis or Takht-e Jamshid, the throne of Jamshid, the mythical founder of Norouz.

This year’s festivals will be hosted in Dushanbe, Tajikistan’s capital. A fusion of Tajik arts: dance, music and mounting spectacles, should offer a more joyous and colourful festival befitting the happy occasion of Norouz.

Baqer Moin is director of Jadidonline.com and former head of BBC Persian and Pashto
Almost all Iranians at some point in their lives turn to Hafez of Shiraz (1325-1389), when they look for an oracle. By interpreting a randomly selected poem from his Divan we seek guidance to make difficult decisions or narrow down choices. The obsession with this lyrical bibliomancy, known as Fal-e Hafez, reaches fever pitch during the Norouz celebrations, soon after the earth passes through the vernal equinox. Mimi Khalvati, an Iranian-born British poet, salutes a famous ghazal of Hafez in her contemporary take on the 800-year-old genre of composition.

**Ghazal**

**After Hafez**

*By Mimi Khalvati from The Meanest Flower, 2007*

However large earth’s garden, mine’s enough  
One rose and shade of a vine’s enough.

I don’t want more wealth, I don’t need more dross  
The grape has its bloom and it shines enough.

Why ask for the moon? The moon’s in your cup,  
A beggar, a tramp, for whom wine’s enough.

Look at the stream as it winds out of sight  
One glance, one glimpse of a chine’s enough.

Like the sun in bazaars, streaming in shafts,  
Any slant on the grand design’s enough.

When you’re here, my love, what more could I want?  
Just mentioning love in a line’s enough.

Heaven can wait. To have found, heaven knows,  
A bed and a roof so divine’s enough.

I’ve no grounds for complaint. As Hafez says,  
Isn’t a ghazal that he signs enough?

The original begins with the lines:

*One rosy cheek from the rose garden of the world is enough for us  
In this meadow, the shade of that cypress gliding by is enough for us.  
The Palace of Paradise is the promised reward for good deeds  
For us reprobates and rogues the tavern of the Magi is enough for us.*
The impact of the Iranian revolution of 1979 on Persian poetry is only beginning to be assessed. Meanwhile, the state's appetite for neo-classical heroic verse, and wordy religious eulogies, fights for public support and publishing space alongside avant-garde expressions of the lives of the overlooked and the ordinary. Below is an extract from *I Behave as I Always Do* by Qeysar Aminpour (1959-2007), known mostly for his poetry of the sacred defence:

---

**I behave as I always do**

*By Qeysar Aminpour, from Mirrors of Abruptness second edition 1998 (Working translation by Narguess Farzad)*

I behave as I always do
But why
Whenever friends or others see me,
Quietly they say:
'These days
You are not yourself!'
But
I am like I’ve always been
same simple quirks
same signature, same name
quiet and calm, as I have always been.

It's just that these days
I feel a little vague
At times befuddled, a little perplexed.
Compared to previous days
I love the 'now' that tiny bit more.

From time to time,
oblivious to news, to passing of the days, the months, the years,
I am a little less,
And sometimes, viscerally more.
And if I dared to say it,
I worship in a different way.

Last night, for example,
More otherly than all other cruel nights,
I was totally at ease.
I sat down and ironed my socks beautifully.
I walked seven miles or so, alone in my room,
I talked to my shoes.
And then

Rummaged through all of my letters-
chasing the fairy tale, seeking that unknown,
probing each and every single line-
but saw nothing.
Except in one, a folded old note,
holding the whiff of heavenly jasmines.

Last night, after thirty years, I saw
the colour of my eyes is honeyish-brown
and unlike previous years
I love purples and mauves
Much more than colour blue.
Last night for the first time I felt
my forename was not so awesome after all.

Sometimes the whole day long, my eyes
trade glances of bonhomie
with strangers in the city,
Sometimes a doleful song
tempts my naive and bashful heart.

But
Being the usual way, my tame and simple self
I have no other cares,
I behave as I always do.
An exhibition has opened at the British Museum that will shed a new light on the sacred journey undertaken by Muslims, the Hajj. Entitled: Hajj: Journey to the Heart of Islam, this is the brain-child of Dr Neil MacGregor, the Museum’s Director, and follows two other recent exhibitions dedicated to spiritual journeys, The Book of the Dead and Treasures of Heaven. Its objective is to show the past and present significance of Hajj as one of the five pillars of Islam and to share the personal experiences of those who have made the journey with both Muslims and non-Muslims. As a journey Hajj has remained essentially the same since the 7th century. Every Muslim must try to make at least one visit to Mecca in his or her lifetime, if he is able to do so.

I talked to Qaisra Khan, Project Curator at the Museum, who, under lead curator Dr Venetia Porter, was responsible for setting up this exhibition, about the ideas behind it and the way this huge project has been tackled. She pointed out that the exhibition is unique, being the first in the world dedicated solely to Hajj. It has taken British Museum staff two years to borrow about 180 objects from 40 collections, in some 13 countries around the world from Africa to Malaysia. There are archaeological objects, artistic pieces, photographs, manuscripts and films. Most lenders were very supportive of the idea and lent willingly. A great deal of material has come from British museums and libraries. The institution which lent most was probably the British Library, but many other London institutions lent things, notably the Arcadian Library and the Khalili Collection which is housed in both London and Geneva. Some material came, of course, from Saudi Arabia itself.

The exhibition, Qaisra Khan told me, has three strands: (a) the journey and preparation, (b) the sanctuary and the rituals of Hajj and (c) what it means to be a Hajji or Hajjia. The objects on display will

It has taken British Museum staff two years to borrow about 180 objects from 40 collections, in some 13 countries around the world from Africa to Malaysia
Five manuscripts borrowed from a library in Timbuktu which describe travellers’ stories are highlights of the exhibition

travellers’ stories. From Damascus another huge pilgrim caravan travelled along an ancient route through the Hejaz which in the 20th century was briefly overlaid in parts by the Hejaz Railway. The leader of the caravan, the Emir al Haj, carried the Ottoman imperial purse with money to hand out to potentially hostile Bedouin encountered along the way. The exhibition has illustrations of how these Ottoman caravans would have looked. Jeddah was the gathering place for pilgrims from South-East Asia, and South Asia as far east as China, most of whom reached Jeddah by boat. There are 17th century depictions of the boats leaving for and arriving at Jeddah, and it is shown how the travel agent Thomas Cook started out by making good the route for pilgrims from India to Jeddah.

The strand on Mecca, (b), includes depictions of the city over time, in photographs, manuscripts and tiles. The organisers were challenged as to how to depict the rituals undergone by pilgrims at Mecca, such as walking seven times round the Ka’bah, running back and forth between the hills of al-Safa and al-Marwah, drinking from the well of Zamzam, undergoing a vigil at Mount Arafat and throwing stones at the devil (the metaphorical pillars called the Jamarat al-Mina). They use both film and objects representing the different rituals, such as stones from the plain of Muzdalifah used to stone the Devil and holy water from the well of Zamzam. There are also examples of the textile known as the kiswah, which covered the Ka’bah. This is a black cloth beautifully embroidered with calligraphic inscriptions from the Koran in gold thread in bands around the top and on the door. The kiswah was formerly woven and embroidered in Cairo but is now made in a factory in Mecca.

The third strand of the exhibition, (c), explores what it means to be a Hajji today with an audio recording in which people who have made the pilgrimage in recent times recount their experiences and explain the significance the journey has had in their lives. Souvenirs brought back by present-day Hajjis and Hajj certificates will be on display.

The exhibition also examines the importance to pilgrims of the ihram, or dress worn for the pilgrimage (consisting of two sheets of white un-hemmed cloth for men and any modest clothing for women). The difficulty of the journey years ago, and still today, is brought out. Poor Muslims would save up for their whole lives to fulfil their dream of going on Hajj but the money ran out for many, and they were forced to sleep on the streets of Mecca and to sell goods for their return journey. Many of them never did return home.

The theme of this exhibition has stimulated some remarkable modern works of art, such as Ahmed Mater’s photogravure etching entitled Magnetism, illustrated here, which belongs to the British Museum. Iron filings represent pilgrims at Mecca.

Qaisra Khan says there is a lack of knowledge of the history of the Hajj, even among Muslims, and certainly among non-Muslims, who are not allowed to enter the sanctuary. This unique exhibition should shed some light on this important facet of Islam and phenomenon of world pilgrimage.

Ionis Thompson is a member of the MEL Editorial Board

(After) A pilgrim during the Hajj, 2010. Taken from The Fifth Pillar (Gilgamesh Publishing) a new book celebrating the photography of Newsha Tavakolian whose work is also exhibited at the British Museum exhibition

(Left) Ahmed Mater, Magnetism (2011) British Museum
In *Mourning*, Morteza Farshbaf adopts a slow-paced and enigmatic style of storytelling with the use of visually simplistic techniques, extended scenes, a 4x4 and just a handful of actors.

Farshbaf’s debut feature film begins in total darkness. We hear a couple arguing violently about whether they will go back to their home in Tehran. Doors slam, then silence. As dawn breaks we catch a glimpse of a boy lying awake in bed. Did he hear the midnight mêlée? In the scene that follows, a car is driven through scenic fields, silently meandering through a dusty road in lush emerald meadows. Subtitles provide a conversation between a man and a woman but we can’t hear or see them. Instead all we can hear is the faint sound of the grass as it dances in the wind. We can guess that the conversation is going on inside the roving car. The camera operates exclusively in wide shots for the first 10 minutes of the film. As the shot eventually switches to the interior of the car, we meet a deaf couple who are bickering using sign language whilst the young boy, Arshia (Amirhossein Maleki) sits watching them in the back.

The couple who had been arguing in the middle of the night were Arshia’s parents. They had suddenly vanished leaving him behind. The deaf couple, Sharareh (Sharareh Pasha) and Kamran (Kiomars Giti) are Arshia’s aunt and uncle and they are *en route* to Tehran, driving through the visually pleasing scenery of the countryside. Sharareh and Kamran are bewildered by Arshia’s parents’ brash decision to leave their son behind. The plot unravels slowly and the facts are revealed subtly, leaving Sharareh and Kamran with a dilemma they do not know how to confront.

The film is refreshing; this is not just another film about the much maligned Middle East and the ills of the Iranian nation. Instead the situation and the characters are universal and could belong to any time and any country. A first-rate soundtrack accompanies this alluring and at times comic road movie. It comes as little surprise to learn that Farshbaf is a protégé of the acclaimed director and screenwriter Abbas Kiarostami.

There is a sense of mystery throughout *Mourning*, which both intrigues and gnaws away at the viewer simultaneously. For the most part the film features just the three actors travelling in a car, communicating via sign language, each filled with angst and sadness.

Ironically, even though it is Sharareh and Kamran who both have a hearing impairment, it is Arshia who is impaired as he cannot understand sign language when the couple argue. In a memorable sequence Arshia sat in the back seat, turns up the volume of the stereo to enjoy an upbeat Azeri song whilst the couple are oblivious to the rhythms that he enjoys so much.

The viewer is led to connect with each of the characters: on the one hand with Arshia’s childhood innocence and on the other, at Sharareh and Kamran’s sense of frustration with their lot in life and the obstacles that they encounter.

Despite the slow plot, the cinematography is poetic and the casting choices are impressively spot on. The actors who play Sharareh and Kamran are a couple in real life who have previously featured in a similar styled short film by Farshbaf.

Farshbaf is a new kid on the block of the third generation Iranian New Wave filmmakers. While it is too soon to say whether he will succeed in joining the cinema hall of fame, judging by his sad yet inspiring first feature, he is almost certainly a force to be reckoned with.

Mohammad Mirbashiri is an independent commentator on Middle Eastern culture and society and alumnus of SOAS.

**Reviewed by Mohammad Mirbashiri**

Iran (2011) 84 mins

Director: Morteza Farshbaf

**Mourning**

Iran (2011) 84 mins

Director: Morteza Farshbaf

*Kiomars Gity, Sharareh Pasha and Amirhossein Maleki in Mourning, 2011*
The Arab Spring
The End of Postcolonialism
Hamid Dabashi

Hamid Dabashi, Professor Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, argues that the revolutionary uprisings that have engulfed multiple countries across the Middle East of late, were driven by a ‘delayed defiance’ - a point of rebellion against domestic tyranny and globalised disempowerment alike that signifies the end of postcolonialism. Ultimately, Dabashi argues, the ‘permanent revolutionary mood’ has the potential to liberate not only those societies already ignited, but also many others through a universal geopolitics of hope.


Europe's Angry Muslims
Robert S Leiken

Covering eight countries and 30 cities, but focusing on Britain and France, Europe's Angry Muslims provides an account of how Islam came to 20th century Europe. This book aims at combining first-hand reporting, based on interviews of former radicals, scrutiny of court records, historical background, and analysis to discuss the complex phenomenon of European Islam. Robert Leiken is Director of the Immigration and National Security Program and the Mexico Program at the Center for the National Interest in the USA.

Oxford University Press, March 2012. £16.99

The Palestine Nakba
Nur Masalha

2012 marks the 63rd anniversary of the Nakba, the most traumatic catastrophe that befell Palestinians. This book explores new ways of remembering and commemorating the Nakba. In the context of Palestinian oral history, it explores ‘social history from below’, the formation of collective identity. Masalha argues that to write more truthfully about the Nakba is not just the practice of professional historiography but it is also an ethical imperative.

I first encountered Sandy Morton at SOAS over 20 years ago when I rather belatedly embarked on my academic career. Initially he presented a rather aloof and intimidating figure, serious and demanding, an old-style scholar and traditionalist teacher. Since then I slowly discovered other facets of this intensely private, surprisingly shy, but kind and tolerant man who later, while remaining a teacher, became a colleague and I hope, in the last years, a friend.

In early 2011 when his advancing cancer had rendered him a virtual prisoner in his own home, I began visiting him on a regular basis and, not always feeling up to scrutinising heavy mediaeval Persian texts as had been our habit over the years, took to reminiscing about the years he had spent in Iran and Afghanistan during the 1970s and of his trip to the wilds of Yemen. He had been a young scholar at the prestigious British Institute of Persian Studies in the Iranian capital eventually being appointed Assistant Director of BIPS, but he had still found the time to hit the hippie trail and he regaled me with tales of haggling in the bazaars and hashish in the chaikhanas of Herat. He relished the memories of his trips to Afghanistan and the gloriously anarchic border posts, the run-down but welcoming hippie hotels, the decrepit intercity buses in a permanent state of lethal disrepair and spoke with affection of his adventures in a land that is no more.

He had already revealed this other side to his personality on our trip to Zhejiang Province in China for a conference on the Yuan dynasty in Hangzhou in November 2010. He was more than happy to explore without question the culinary excesses laid before him and to launch into a foot tour of the backstreets and local markets of the Hangzhou away from the tourist spots, fed solely by the stimulant of restless curiosity. I completely forgot that I was accompanying by a 69 year old man wracked by cancer as I led him from one historical site to another, up one mountain and down another, finishing off another day over beers while watching the haggling at Hangzhou’s night-time street market. He was a man very much alive and enjoying life whether it was the intellectual nourishment of the conference, the rich and varied food of China’s streets or simply the tapestry of life in evidence in the crowds swarming around West Lake and he had a full life and career to look back on.

Born on April 11, 1942 in India (now Pakistan) in the last years of the Raj, Sandy still retained memories from his time in Multan where his father, Kenneth Morton CIE OBE, a member of the Indian Civil Service, was stationed. Sandy was the third of five children (Felicity, Kenneth, who died some time ago, Sandy, William and James). His mother, Mary Morton, was the daughter of Sir John Marshall, who is known for his work at the sites of Mohendejaro and Taxila.

The family left the sub-continent in 1947 shortly before independence and lived in Edinburgh for a short while before moving to Cambridge in 1948. Sandy specialised in Arabic. Graduating in 1964 and supported by a scholarship, he commenced work at the British Institute of Persian Studies in Tehran where he remained until 1967, when he left to begin a PhD under the supervision of the formidable Professor Ann Lambton. The call of the East was strong and he returned to Tehran as Assistant Director of BIPS though he left some time before the revolution of 1979.

Although Sandy never completed his PhD he had the distinction of being one of the few distinguished scholars who achieved enviable academic success without having to actually submit a dissertation. He wore the title of ‘Mr’ with pride. Sandy’s encyclopaedic knowledge of Iranian history and Islamic art, as well as European literature was legendary. At SOAS where he remained until his early retirement in 1999, he started initially as a lecturer in Persian and was eventually appointed Senior Lecturer of the Persian section of the NME Department.

For one who carries such a formidable reputation and whose renown is international and widely respected his publishing output is relatively modest. On his death only three books bore his name so it is most welcome that at least two more titles will be appearing soon in China under his name, confirmation of which he gratefully received before the end. He authored a number of articles whose varied subject matter reflected his own diverse interests, which included literature, architecture, philosophy and of course first and foremost, history.

Towards the end he had been reluctant to let people know just how ill he had become and I felt that I should ensure that people knew. What immediately struck me was just how many people harboured great warmth and affection for Sandy and he was very moved and genuinely surprised at the number of well-wishers that contacted and visited him in his final weeks.

George Lane is Senior Teaching Fellow in the History of the Middle East and Central Asia at SOAS
THE EVENTS and organisations listed below are not necessarily endorsed or supported by The Middle East in London. The accompanying texts and images are based primarily on information provided by the organisers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the compilers or publishers. While every possible effort is made to ascertain the accuracy of these listings, readers are advised to seek confirmation of all events using the contact details provided for each event.

Submitting entries and updates: please send all updates and submissions for entries related to future events via e-mail to mepub@soas.ac.uk or by fax to 020 7898 4329.

BM – British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG
SOAS – School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG
LSE – London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2 2AE

FEBRUARY EVENTS

Wednesday 1 February

7:00 pm | Wael Ghonim in conversation with Ben Hammersley: Revolution 2.0 (Discussion) Organised by: Frontline Club. Named one of Time magazine's top 100 most influential people, Wael Ghonim, is credited with having sparked Egypt’s revolution with a Facebook page he dedicated to a victim of the regime's violence. Tickets: £20/£15 conc. Venue TBC T 020 7479 8940 W www.frontlineclub.com

7:30 pm | The House of Bernarda
in power (Seminar) Gamon McEllan, SOAS. Organised by: SOAS Modern Turkish Studies Programme (London Middle East Institute, SOAS) and sponsored by Nurol Bank. Part of the Seminars on Turkey series. Convened by Benjamin Fortna, SOAS. Admission free. Room 116, SOAS. T 020 7898 4431 E bp@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

6:30 pm | Journey to Mecca: In the footsteps of Ibn Battuta (Film) Organised by: BM. Also on Friday 30 March. Dir Bruce Neibaur (2009), 45 min. Film based on the true story of Ibn Battuta, who set out from Morocco in 1325 on an epic journey to the sacred city of Mecca. Followed by a discussion with the filmmakers. Tickets: £3/£2 BM Members/conc. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Saturday 4 February

9:40 am | The Idea of Iran: the age of the great Saljuqs (Symposium) Organised by: Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS. The Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS and the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford with the support of the Soudavar Memorial Foundation. Under the Saljuqs (11th and 12th centuries CE) a system of government based on Turkish ‘men of the sword’ and Persian ‘men of the pen’ was consolidated presenting us with a wealth of themes to explore and unanswered questions to debate in the ninth programme in ‘The Idea of Iran’ series. Tickets: £15/£10 LMEI Affiliates & conc./students free To book W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/events/ Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/

Monday 6 February

1:15 pm | Hajj: curator’s introduction (Gallery Talk) Organised by: BM. Exhibition curators Veneta Porter and Qaisra Khan give an illustrated introduction to the Hajj exhibition. Admission free. BP Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

5:15 pm | Politics of Mass Consumption in Egypt and Saudi Arabia during the Oil Boom (Seminar) Relli Shechter, Ben-Gurion University. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. Room G3, SOAS. E bf7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehistseminar/

6:00 pm | Salinisation in Mesopotamia from a social-environmental perspective (Seminar) Mark Altaweel, University College London. Organised by: LCANE. Part of LCANE Spring Seminar Series 2012 ‘New Research’. Convened by Mark Weeden. SOAS. Admission free. Room G51, SOAS. E ag5@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/ane/lcane/
6:30 pm | Muslim Cosmopolitanism or Heresy? Lessons for the Aftermath of the 2011 Arab spring (Lecture) Carool Kersten, King’s College London. Organised by: Middle East Centre, LSE. A talk on how three emblematic Muslim intellectuals from Algeria, Egypt and Indonesia give new relevance to religion in the post-secular and post-Islamist Muslim world of the 21st century. Chaired by Kirsten Schulze, LSE. Admission free. CLM 7.02, Clement House, LSE. T 020 7955 6365 E rlowe@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

7:00 pm | The 2011 Saif Ghobash-Banipal Prize for Arabic Literary Translation (Lecture) Organised by: Banipal. Award Ceremony for the 2011 Prize for Arabic Literary Translation which is awarded to Khaled Mattawa for his translation of ‘Adonis: Selected Poems’, published by Yale University Press. With a lecture by Sean O’Brien on ‘Making the Crossing: the poet as translator’. Tickets: £9.50. King’s Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9AG. T 020 7832 1350 E info@banipaltrust.org.uk W www.banipaltrust.org.uk/prize/

Tuesday 7 February
1:15 pm | Idris Khan’s ‘Seven Times’ (Gallery Talk) Louisa Macmillan, BM. Organised by: BM. Admission free. Information Desk, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

5:45 pm | The ‘Arab Awakening’ in North Africa - one year after (Lecture) George Joffé, Cambridge University. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East, The Middle East in Transition: a new social economic and political landscape? Tea and biscuits available from 5:30pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 8 February
6:00 pm | Know how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? (Panel Debate) Damian Gorman; Anton Obholzer. Organised by: The Olive Tree Programme. Olive Tree Middle East Forum. Admission free. A130, College Building, 280 St John Street, London EC1V 4PB. E olivetree@city.ac.uk W www.city.ac.uk/olivetree

7:00 pm | Lessons from Raqqa (Lecture) Oliver Watson, University of Oxford. Organised by: Islamic Art Circle at SOAS. Part of the Islamic Art Circle at SOAS Lecture Programme. Chaired by Doris Behrens-Abousef, SOAS. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 0771 408 7480 E RosalindHaddon@aol.com W www.soas.ac.uk

Thursday 9 February
6:00 pm | Recent Developments in Yemen (Lecture) Qais Ghanem, physician, poet, community leader and radio show host. Organised by: The British-Yemeni Society. Refreshments from 5:30pm. Tickets: £10/£5 if accompanied by a Member). Middle East Association, Bury House, 33 Bury Street, London SW1Y 6AX. T 020 7603 8895 / 07787 158658 E I.rebeccajohnson@gmail.com W www.al-bab.com/bys

NEW FROM I.B.TAU里斯

A COMpanion TO MUSLIM CULTURES
EDITED BY AMYN B. SAJO0
224 pages 216 x 134mm 9781848855953 HB £25.00

A COMpanion TO MUSLIM ETHICS
EDITED BY AMYN B. SAJO0
256 pages 216 x 134mm 9781780761275 HB £25.00

A COMpanion TO MUSLIM WORLD
EDITED BY AMYN B. SAJO0
336 pages 216 x 134mm 9781848851931 HB £25.00

I.B.Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies www.ibtauris.com
**Friday 10 February**

1:15 pm | **Pilgrim Pioneers: Britons on Hajj before 1940** (Lecture) William Facey, writer and publisher. Organised by: BM. Talk tracing Britain’s relations with Islam back a thousand years. Admission free. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

**Monday 13 February**

11:00 am | **Half-term activities: Arabian encounters** (Family Event: Monday 13 – Friday 17 February) Organised by: BM. Encounter the cultures of Arabia in a week of special activities. Suitable for all ages, until 4:00pm, just drop in. Admission free. Great Court, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

6:00 pm | **The Rise and Decline of Population Politics in Turkey** (Lecture) M Asım Karaömerlioğlu, The Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul. Organised by: LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies. Chaired by Şevket Pamuk, LSE. Admission free. COW1.11, Cañada Blanch Room, Cowdray House, LSE. T 020 7955 6067 E euroinst.turkish.studies@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk EuropeanInstitute/research/ContemporaryTurkishStudies/Home.aspx

7:00 pm | **Screenings from the Frontline with Al Jazeera: Tweets from Tahrir** (Film) Organised by: Frontline Club. Followed by Q&A with director Damian Clarke and Adib Nessem. A year ago Cairo’s “Twitterati” tweeted their revolution for 18 days in and around Tahrir Square. Tickets: £10/£8 conc. Frontline Club, 13 Norfolk Place, London W2 1QJ. T 020 7479 8940 W www.frontlineclub.com

**Tuesday 14 February**

7:00 pm | **Third Party Screening: The Ayatollah’s Seal** (Film) Organised by: BBC Persian. BBC Persian’s ground-breaking documentary charts the Ayatollah’s reign and, through a number of interviews, builds a profile of Iran’s most powerful man. Tickets: £10/£8 conc. Frontline Club, 13 Norfolk Place, London W2 1QJ. T 020 7479 8940 W www.frontlineclub.com

**Wednesday 15 February**

4:30 pm | **Basra, Southern Iraq and the Gulf: challenges and connections** (Seminar) Kristian Ulrichsen, LSE Kuwait Programme. Organised by: LSE Kuwait Programme. Presentation examining the historical connections linking together an oft en fragile regional community, as well as the array of new issues that threaten to undermine the veneer of stability in Basra and southern Iraq and their relations with neighbouring states. Admission free. KSW 1.04, 20 Kingsway, LSE. T 0207 955 6639 E i.sinclair@lse.ac.uk

7:00 pm | **The 1953 coup against Mossadeq** (Lecture) Christopher de Bellaigue, journalist and author. Organised by: The Iran Society. 6:30pm for 7:00pm. Tickets: £10. Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London SW7 2AR. T 020 7235 5122 E info@iran society.org W wwwiran society.org

**Friday 17 February**

6:30 pm | **Lawrence of Arabia** (Film) Organised by: BM. Dir David Lean (1962), 216 min. Peter O’Toole stars as T E Lawrence in the classic Oscar-winning epic. Tickets: £3/£2

---

**OLIVE TREE MIDDLE EAST FORUM**

**Syria: Prospects, Risks and implications of International Intervention**

**Date:** Wednesday 22 February 2012  
**Time:** 6 – 7:30pm  
**Location:** A130, College Building, 280 St John Street, London EC1V 4PB

**To discuss this topic:**

**Lord Mark Malloch-Brown:** Now at FTI Consulting and formerly Minister in Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s cabinet. Lord Malloch-Brown served as Deputy Secretary General and Chief of Staff of the United Nations under Kofi Annan having previously been Administrator of the UN Development Programme, and a Vice-President at the World Bank. He is also the author of The Unfinished Global Revolution: The Pursuit of a New International Politics.

**Dr Maha Azzam:** Associate Fellow of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Chatham House, working on Political Islam in general and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in particular. Previously she headed a programme on ‘Security and Development in Muslim States’, at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies (RUSI).

ALL welcome. To register, no charge, please contact: olivetree@city.ac.uk www.city.ac.uk/olivetree

---

28 The Middle East in London February-March 2012
Saturday 18 February

1:15 pm | Hijj: curator’s introduction (Gallery Talk) Organised by: BM. See listing for Monday 6 February for details.

6:45 pm | Intoxication of Hafez, Persian Poetry & Music (Concert) Organised by: Light of Music in cooperation with the Centre for Iranian Studies, SOAS. An opportunity to enjoy the poetry of Hafez accompanied by a fusion of Eastern and Western musical instruments. The first part of the concert will focus on Hafez and the second part will consist of innovative music performed by talented musicians from Iran. Tickets: £20/£15 (students only) - To book W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/events/ Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4330 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/

Monday 20 February

5:15 pm | Tolerance through Misunderstanding: The Experience of the Catholic Missionaries in Smyrna in the 17th and 18th Centuries (Seminar) Viviana Tagliaferri, SOAS. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. Room G3, SOAS. E ag5@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/ane/lcane/continentalstudies/ COW1.11, Cañada Blanch Room, Cowdray House, LSE.

6:00 pm | Contact, Conflict and Identity in Bronze Age Northern Anatolia (Seminar) Claudia Glatz, Glasgow University. Organised by: LCANE. Part of LCANE Spring Seminar Series 2012 ‘New Research’. Convened by Mark Weeden, SOAS. Admission free. Room G51, SOAS. E ag5@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/ane/lcane/

Tuesday 21 February

5:45 pm | Shifts in US/EU policy towards the ME in light of the 'Arab Spring' (Lecture) Corinna Mullin, SOAS. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East, The Middle East in Transition: a new social, economic and political landscape? Tea and biscuits available from 5:30pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Wednesday 22 February

6:00 pm | Syria: Prospects, Risks and Implications of International Intervention (Lecture) Lord Mark Malloch-Brown, FTI Consulting; Maha Azzam, Chatham House. Organised by: Olive Tree Programme. Olive Tree Middle East Forum. Admission free. A130, College Building, 280 St John Street, London EC1V 4PB. E olivetree@city.ac.uk W www.city.ac.uk/olivetree

7:00 pm | FCBBCA: Iran - diplomatic tensions and power (Panel Discussion) Organised by: Frontline Club. A panel on the growing tensions between Iran and the West, the internal power struggle within Iranian power elites and what the future could hold for the pro-democracy Green Movement. Tickets: £20/£15 conc. Royal Institution of Great Britain, 21 Albemarle Street, London W1S 4BS. T 020 7479 8940 W www.frontlineclub.com

Friday 24 February

6:00 pm | Hajj and the future of Islam (Discussion) Organised by: BM. Karen Armstrong, author, theologian, and British Museum Trustee, and Tariq Ramadan, University of Oxford, discuss what spiritual, moral, political, and religious lessons Hajj can teach Muslims and non-Muslims about Islam. Tickets: £5/£3 BM Members/conc. BP Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Saturday 25 February

1:30 pm | Journeys to Mecca: archive film afternoon Organised by: BM. An afternoon of talks and early documentaries and films featuring Hajj and Mecca. Tickets: £10/£6 BM Members/conc. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Monday 27 February

5:15 pm | Public Display and Individual Concern: Representing Archaeology in the Turkish Republic (Seminar) Organised
by: Department of History, SOAS. Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. Room G3, SOAS. E bf7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehistseminar/

6:00 pm | Turkey’s Agricultural Transformation: Is a Reversal in the Making? (Seminar) İnsan Tunah, Department of Economics, Koç University, Istanbul. Organised by: LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies. Chaired by Şevket Pamuk. Admission free. COW1.11, Cañada Blanch Room, Cowdray House, LSE. T 020 7955 6067 E euroinst.turkish.studies@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/ContemporaryTurkishStudies/Home.aspx

Tuesday 28 February

5:45 pm | Between art and alienation, the painted T-Walls in segmented 2012 Baghdad (Lecture) Caecilia Pieri, Head of the Urban Observatory, French Institute of the Near-East, Beirut. By analysing the concrete T-Walls in today’s Baghdad, the lecture will address issues including the reshaping of living spaces and the appropriation of public spaces by various groups. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East, The Middle East in Transition: a new social economic and political landscape? Tea and biscuits available from 5:30pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

6:30 pm | European Questions - Turkish Angles: Europe’s Unemployment (Conference) Sean Sayers, University of Kent; Marco Simoni, European Institute, LSE; İnsan Tunah, Department of Economics, Koç University, Istanbul. Organised by: LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies and the Forum for European Philosophy. Chaired by Simon Glendinning, European Institute, LSE. Admission free. Wolfson Theatre, New Academic Building, LSE. T 020 7955 6067 E euroinst.turkish.studies@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/europeInstitute/research/ContemporaryTurkishStudies/Home.aspx

Wednesday 29 February

1:00 pm | Title TBC (Lecture) Egemen Bağış, Turkish Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator. Organised by: LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies. Chaired by Şevket Pamuk, LSE. Admission free. Room TBC, LSE. T 020 7955 6067 E euroinst.turkish.studies@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/ContemporaryTurkishStudies/Home.aspx

Mon 6 February

10:00 am | Opening the Boundaries of Citizenship (Two-Day Conference: Monday 6 – Tuesday 7 February) Organised by: Oecumene Project. The Conference will explore
new approaches and methods to conceptualising and politicking citizenship. Includes a keynote lecture by Judith Butler, University of California, on ‘Self-Determination, Palestinian Statehood, and the Anarchist Impasse’. Tickets: £50/£30 student conc. The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, UK. E Oecumene-Project@open.ac.uk W www.oecumene.eu/events/1st-symposium

Tuesday 7 February

10:00 am | Opening the Boundaries of Citizenship (Two-Day Conference: Monday 6 – Tuesday 7 February) See Events Outside London listing for Monday 6 February for details.

2:00 pm | Market Forces and Evaluation (Seminar) Carlo Berardi. Organised by: The Khalili Research Centre, Oxford (KRC). KRC Research Seminar on Contemporary Middle Eastern Art. Admission free. Lecture Room, Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford, 3 St John Street, Oxford OX1 2LG. T 01865 278 222 E farzaneh.pirouz-moussavi@sant.ox.ac.uk W www.krc.ox.ac.uk

Friday 10 February

5:00 pm | The Guardian and the Arab Spring (Seminar) Ian Black. Organised by: Middle East Centre, Oxford. See Events Outside London listing for Friday 3 February for details.

Tuesday 14 February

2:00 pm | TBC (Seminar) Venetia Porter. Organised by: The Khalili Research Centre, Oxford (KRC). See Events Outside London listing for 7 February for details.

Wednesday 15 February

2:00 pm | Sudanese Programme Workshop Presentations by researchers at Oxford University. Admission free. Nissan Lecture Theatre, St Antony’s College, 62 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JF. T 01865 284780 E ahmed.al-shahi@sant.ox.ac.uk W www.sant.ox.ac.uk

Friday 17 February

5:00 pm | Changing Politics and MENA Energy Challenges (Seminar) Hakim Darbouche. Organised by: Middle East Centre, Oxford. See Events Outside London listing for Friday 3 February for details.

Tuesday 21 February

2:00 pm | The Importance of Middle Eastern Art and the Global Market (Seminar) Desiré Feuerle. Organised by: The Khalili Research Centre, Oxford (KRC). See Events Outside London listing for 7 February for details.

Friday 24 February


Tuesday 28 February

2:00 pm | Thirty years of giving visibility to artists from the Arab World and Iran (Seminar) Rose Issa. Organised by: The Khalili Research Centre, Oxford (KRC).

See Events Outside London listing for 7 February for details.

MARCH EVENTS

Thursday 1 March

TBC | Centre for Palestine Studies at the London Middle East Institute, SOAS Launch Event (Organised by: Centre for Palestine Studies, LMEI, SOAS) Programme and tickets available online W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/ Tickets TBC Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4330 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei

1:15 pm | The archaeology and material culture of Hajj in sub-Saharan Africa (Lecture) Tim Insoll, University of Manchester. Organised by: BM. Talk exploring the history, processes, archaeology and material culture of Hajj in sub-Saharan Africa since the 8th-9th centuries AD. Admission free. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Saturday 3 March

2:00 pm | Lord Jim (Film) Jim is a promising young English merchant seaman who joins the SS Patna, crammed with hundreds of Muslims on pilgrimage to Mecca. Dir Richard Brooks (1965), 154 min. Tickets: £3/£2 BM Members/conc. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Monday 5 March

5:15 pm | Rulers and Merchants in Pre-oil Kuwait: the significance of date plantations (Seminar) Eran Segal, SOAS. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Seminar on the History of the Near
The Other Side of Paradise (See Exhibitions, page 34)

and Middle East. Admission free. Room G51, SOAS. E bg7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehistseminar/

6:00 pm | Banquet in fableland: real and imagined worlds in glyptic iconography (Seminar) Birger Helgestad, BM. Part of LCANE Spring Seminar Series 2012 ‘New Research’. Convened by Mark Weeden. SOAS. Admission free. Room G51, SOAS. E ag5@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/ane/lcane/

6:30 pm | Men Who Tiptoe Into Their Marital Bedrooms: the novelist and dictatorship (Lecture) Hisham Matar, Libyan novelist, author of ‘In the Country of Men’ and ‘The Novel’ and Dictatorship. Admission free. Room G3, SOAS. E b7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehistseminar/

Tuesday 6 March

5:45 pm | Between Ideology and Pragmatism: Zionism in National Socialist Jewish Policy (Lecture) Francis Nicosia, University of Vermont. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East, Middle East in Transition: a new social economic and political landscape? Tea and biscuits available from 5:30pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Tuesday 13 March

5:45 pm | Le Monde diplomatique (Lecture) Alain Gresh; Gilbert Achcar, SOAS. Organised by: London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). Part of the LMEI’s Tuesday Evening Lecture Programme on the Contemporary Middle East, Middle East in Transition: a new social economic and political landscape? Tea and biscuits available from 5:30pm. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

Monday 12 March

5:15 pm | Saddam Hussein’s Ba’th Party: Inside an Authoritarian Regime (Seminar) Joseph Sassoon, Georgetown University. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. Room G3, SOAS. E b7@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehistseminar/

7:00 pm | An Approach to Symbolism in Islamic Art (Lecture) Organised by: The Temenos Academy. Doors open 6:30pm. Lecture by Jason Elliott, the author of ‘An Unexpected Light: Travels in Afghanistan’ and ‘Mirrors of the Unseen: Journeys in Iran’. Tickets: £5/£3.50 conc. The Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD. T 01233 813663 E temenosacademy@myfastmail.com

Wednesday 14 March

4:30 pm | Social media, surveillance & identity in the Bahrain Uprising (Seminar) Marc Owen Jones, PhD student, School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University. Organised by: LSE Kuwait Programme. Using Bahrain as a case study, this seminar will explore how social media is used by the regime and hegemonic forces to quell dissent. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7898 4490 E vp6@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/lmei/events/

4:15 pm | Critical Rationalism and Religious and Political Reform in Iran (Lecture) Organised by: Middle East Centre, LSE. Sir Karl Popper Memorial Lecture. The intellectual Abdulkarim Soroush will discuss the role of philosophy – and Popper’s thought in particular – in Iranian religious and political reform. Chaired by John Worrall. Admission free, pre-registration required. Sheikh Zayed Theatre, New Academic Building, LSE. T 020 7955 6365 E r.lowe@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

Friday 16 March

1:15 pm | Jerusalem the Golden: the Church of the Holy Sepulchre models (Gallery Talk) Jonathan Williams, BM. Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 3, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org
6:30 pm | The Magnetism of Mecca: Hajj as artistic inspiration (Discussion) Organised by: BM. Artists Idris Khan, Peter Saunders, and Ahmed Mater, whose works feature in the Hajj exhibition, discuss with Exhibition Curator Venetia Porter how the spiritual and cultural aspects of Hajj have taken them on their own journeys. Tickets: £5/£3 BM Members/conc. BP Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Saturday 17 March

TBC | Norouz: The Iranian New Year (Celebration) Tickets TBC The Great Room, Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane, London W1K 7TN. T 020 7493 4766 E info@iranheritage.org W www.iranheritage.org

TBC | The Struggle for Democracy in Palestine and the Middle East: realities, prospects, dialectics (Conference) Organised by: SOAS Palestine Society and hosted by the London Middle East Institute, SOAS (LMEI). The 2012 Annual Palestine Conference. Tickets: TBC. Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. E palsoc@soas.ac.uk W www.soaspalsoc.org

1:15 pm | Arabic and Arabesque: themes in Islamic art (Gallery Talk) Carolyn Perry, independent lecturer. Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 34, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

2:00 pm | Roads to Mecca (Film) Organised by: BM.Dirs Taran Davies & Ghasem Ebrahimian (2010), 60 min. Documentary following the Muslim and non-Muslim members of a film crew as they try to make the first IMAX movie on Hajj, Journey to Mecca. Admission free. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Monday 19 March

5:15 pm | Charles Malik's Political Profile: Lebanon's permanence and its transient struggles (Seminar) Tony Nasrallah, SOAS. Organised by: Department of History, SOAS. Seminar on the History of the Near and Middle East. Admission free. Room G3, SOAS. E b17@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/history/events/nmehsiseminar/

6:00 pm | Karkamiş Revisited (Seminar) David Hawkins, SOAS. Organised by: LCANE. Part of LCANE Spring Seminar Series 2012 'New Research'. Convened by Mark Weeden. SOAS. Admission free. Room G51, SOAS. E ag5@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/nme/ane/lcane/

7:00 pm | Rumi and the Perennial Philosophy (Lecture) H M Ghomshei. Organised by: The Temenos Academy. Doors open 6:30pm. Tickets: £5/£3.50 conc. The Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD. T 01233 813663 E temenosacademy@myfastmail.com

Wednesday 21 March

5:30 pm | Anthropology, History and Linguistics: Ataturk and the New Turkish Nationalism, 1922-1938 (Lecture) Şüküri Hanioğlu, Princeton University. Organised by: LSE Contemporary Turkish Studies and SOAS. Chaired by Benjamin Fortna, SOAS. Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7955 6067 E euroinst.turkish.studies@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/europeanInstitute/research/ContemporaryTurkishStudies/Home.aspx

7:00 pm | The Discourses of Rumi (Lecture) H M Ghomshei. Organised by: The Temenos Academy. Doors open 6:30pm. Tickets: £5/£3.50 conc. The Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD. T 01233 813663 E temenosacademy@myfastmail.com

Friday 23 March

2:00 pm | British Institute of Persian Studies (BIPS) Annual Workshop Organised by: British Institute of Persian Studies (BIPS). For further details see the BIPS/LMEI websites. E bips@britac.ac.uk W www.bips.ac.uk

6:30 pm | Hajj Among Pilgrimages (Discussion) Malise Ruthven, author; Tim Winter, University of Cambridge. Organised by: BM. A look at the contemporary experiences of Hajj and its unique nature in relation to pilgrimage experiences across cultures and faiths. Tickets: £5/£3 BM Members/ conc. BP Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Saturday 24 March

10:00 am | Persian New Year Norouz Celebrations at SOAS (Organised by: Centre for Iranian Studies, LMEI, SOAS) A celebration of Norouz with music, poetry and food. Programme and tickets available online from mid-February W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/events/ Tickets: £25/£15 students. Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 020 7989 4330 E lh2@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/

Monday 26 March

9:15 am | Revolution and Revolt: Understanding the Forms and Causes of Change (Three-Day Conference: Monday 26 - Wednesday 28 March) Organised by: British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) and hosted by the Middle East Centre at LSE. BRISMES Annual Conference 2012. The unprecedented uprisings in the Middle East over the past year have drawn comparisons with a wide scope of revolts, this conference will seek to place the focus on a multi-disciplinary consideration of the local and regional forces which have fuelled the uprisings. Various ticket prices. LSE. T 020 7955 6365 E rlowe@lse.ac.uk W www2.lse.ac.uk/middleEastCentre/home.aspx

1:15 pm | One Thousand Roads to Mecca (Lecture) Organised by: BM. Talk by the author Michael Wolfe on the shared Abrahamic roots of the Hajj rites and the modern transformation of the original pilgrimage routes. Admission free. Stevenson Lecture Theatre, BM. T 020 7323 8181 E tickets@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

7:00 pm | Rumi’s Teachings of Love (Lecture) H M Ghomshei. Organised by: The Temenos Academy. Doors open 6:30pm. Tickets: £5/£3.50 conc. The Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD. T 01233 813663 E temenosacademy@myfastmail.com

Tuesday 27 March

9:00 am | Revolution and Revolt: Understanding the Forms and Causes of Change (Three-Day Conference: Monday 26 - Wednesday 28 March) See listing for Monday 26 March for details.

Wednesday 28 March

9:00 am | Revolution and Revolt: Understanding the Forms and Causes of Change (Three-Day Conference: Monday 26 - Wednesday 28 March) See listing for Monday 26 March for details.

7:00 pm | Form & Meaning in Rumi: an aesthetic approach (Lecture) H M Ghomshei. Organised by: The Temenos Academy. Doors open 6:30pm. Tickets: £5/£3.50 conc. The Royal Asiatic Society, 14 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD. T 01233 813663 E temenosacademy@myfastmail.com

Friday 30 March

1:15 pm | Journey to Mecca: In the footsteps of Ibn Battuta (Film) Organised by: BM. Also on Friday 30 March. Dir Bruce Neibaur (2009), 45 min. Film based on the true story of Ibn Battuta, who set out from Morocco in 1325 on an epic journey of the ancient festival of the Spring Equinox, Norouz. Activities will include film screenings, a specially commissioned score by Fari Bradley, and workshops in geometric design and felt making. Persian food and tea will be served and the evening will end with a Norouz New Year Countdown. Admission free, some events may be ticketed. Victoria and Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL. T 020 7942 2000 W www.vam.ac.uk

Friday 2 March

5:00 pm | Truman to Bush: The Impact of the Middle East on the US Presidency (Seminar) Roger Adelson. Organised by: Middle East Centre, Oxford. Admission free. Middle East Centre, 62 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JE. T 01865 284780 W www.britishmuseum.org

TUESDAY 6 MARCH

2:00 pm | Art of the Middle East (Seminar) Saeb Eigner. Organised by: The Khalili Research Centre, Oxford (KRC). KRC Research Seminar on Contemporary Middle Eastern Art. Admission free. Lecture Room, Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford, 3 St John Street, Oxford OX1 2LG. T 01865 278 222 E farzaneh.pirouza@krc.ox.ac.uk W www.krc.ox.ac.uk

Friday 9 March

5:00 pm | Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: inside an Authoritarian Regime (Seminar) Joseph Sassoon. Organised by: Middle East Centre, SOAS. See Events Outside London listing for Friday 2 March for details.

Thursday 15 March

TBC | Asmaa (Film) Organised by: Brighton and Sussex Medical School. Part of the Ethics in Performance series. Dir Amr Salama. Real-life story about an Egyptian widow with HIV who battles to overcome society's prejudices and receive proper treatment. To be followed by a panel discussion and Q&A. Tickets TBC. Chowen Lecture Theatre, Brighton and Sussex Medical School, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9PX. E s.eckstein@bsms.ac.uk / b.farsides@bsms.ac.uk W www.bsms.ac.uk/research/our-research/medical-ethics/

EXHIBITIONS

Wednesday 1 February

Until 25 February | Farhad Ahrarnia: ‘Canary in a Coal Mine’ For his second solo show with Rose Issa Projects, Ahrarnia has created larger-format works inspired by the idea of the caged canary, singing in the depths of the ground, digging into the fabric of life. Admission free. Rose Issa Projects, 269 Kensington High Street, London W8 6NA. T 020 7602 7700 E info@roseissa.com W www.roseissa.com

Until 15 April | Khaled Akil: The Unmentioned Khaled Akil’s latest exhibition explores the social, political, sexual and religious issues facing Syria. Admission free. Lahd Gallery, 92 Heath Street, London NW3 1DP. T 020 7345 7323 E info@lahdgallery.com W www.lahdgallery.com

Friday 3 February

Until 30 March | A Tribute to Adonis A tribute to the Syrian poet, Adonis, winner of the 2011 Goethe Prize and a favourite for the Nobel Prize for Literature, which includes an exhibition of his drawings and a series of literary events celebrating his life. Admission free. The Mosaic Rooms, 226 Cromwell Road, London, SW5 0SW. W www.mosaicrooms.org

Thursday 9 February

Until 31 March | Laila Shawa: The Other Side of Paradise Exhibition of canvases and sculptures by Laila Shawa, an artist known for her uncompromising documentation of events in today’s Middle East. A workshop to accompany the exhibition will take place on Saturday 11 February along with a talk by the artist on Saturday 18 February. Admission free. October Gallery, 24 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3AL. T 020 7242 7367 W www.octobergallery.co.uk

EVENTS OUTSIDE LONDON

Friday 2 March

5:00 pm | Truman to Bush: The Impact of the Middle East on the US Presidency (Seminar) Roger Adelson. Organised by: Middle East Centre, Oxford. Admission free. Middle East Centre, 62 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JE. T 01865 284780 W www.britishmuseum.org

Until 7 March | Khaled Akil: The Unmentioned Khaled Akil’s latest exhibition explores the social, political, sexual and religious issues facing Syria. Admission free. Lahd Gallery, 92 Heath Street, London NW3 1DP. T 020 7345 7323 E info@lahdgallery.com W www.lahdgallery.com

Friday 3 February

Until 30 March | A Tribute to Adonis A tribute to the Syrian poet, Adonis, winner of the 2011 Goethe Prize and a favourite for the Nobel Prize for Literature, which includes an exhibition of his drawings and a series of literary events celebrating his life. Admission free. The Mosaic Rooms, 226 Cromwell Road, London, SW5 0SW. W www.mosaicrooms.org

Thursday 9 February

Until 31 March | Laila Shawa: The Other Side of Paradise Exhibition of canvases and sculptures by Laila Shawa, an artist known for her uncompromising documentation of events in today’s Middle East. A workshop to accompany the exhibition will take place on Saturday 11 February along with a talk by the artist on Saturday 18 February. Admission free. October Gallery, 24 Old Gloucester Street, London WC1N 3AL. T 020 7242 7367 W www.octobergallery.co.uk

EVENTS OUTSIDE LONDON

Friday 2 March

5:00 pm | Truman to Bush: The Impact of the Middle East on the US Presidency (Seminar) Roger Adelson. Organised by: Middle East Centre, Oxford. Admission free. Middle East Centre, 62 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JE. T 01865 284780 W www.britishmuseum.org

TUESDAY 6 MARCH

2:00 pm | Art of the Middle East (Seminar) Saeb Eigner. Organised by: The Khalili Research Centre, Oxford (KRC). KRC Research Seminar on Contemporary Middle Eastern Art. Admission free. Lecture Room, Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford, 3 St John Street, Oxford OX1 2LG. T 01865 278 222 E farzaneh.pirouza@krc.ox.ac.uk W www.krc.ox.ac.uk

Friday 9 March

5:00 pm | Saddam Hussein's Ba'th Party: inside an Authoritarian Regime (Seminar) Joseph Sassoon. Organised by: Middle East Centre, SOAS. See Events Outside London listing for Friday 2 March for details.

Thursday 15 March

TBC | Asmaa (Film) Organised by: Brighton and Sussex Medical School. Part of the Ethics in Performance series. Dir Amr Salama. Real-life story about an Egyptian widow with HIV who battles to overcome society's prejudices and receive proper treatment. To be followed by a panel discussion and Q&A. Tickets TBC. Chowen Lecture Theatre, Brighton and Sussex Medical School, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9PX. E s.eckstein@bsms.ac.uk / b.farsides@bsms.ac.uk W www.bsms.ac.uk/research/our-research/medical-ethics/

EXHIBITIONS

Wednesday 1 February

Until 25 February | Farhad Ahrarnia: 'Canary in a Coal Mine' For his second solo show with Rose Issa Projects, Ahrarnia has created larger-format works inspired by the idea of the caged canary, singing in the depths of the ground, digging into the fabric of life. Admission free. Rose Issa Projects, 269 Kensington

34 The Middle East in London February-March 2012
The Idea of Iran: the age of the great Saljuqs

A Symposium

Saturday 4th February 2012
9.40am - 6.10pm (Registration from 9.00am)
Brunei Gallery Lecture Theatre
School of Oriental and African Studies
Russell Square
London WC1H 0XG

Admission
£15.00; £10.00 conc. (OAPs & LMEI Affiliates)
Students Free (to include lunch)

Enquiries & Bookings
Tel. No. 020 7898 4490 E-mail: vp6@soas.ac.uk
www.soas.ac.uk/iranianstudies/

Organised by
The Centre for Iranian Studies,
SOAS
and
The Faculty of Oriental Studies,
University of Oxford

Supported by
The Soudavar Memorial Foundation
Many people seem to, but dialogue changes their thinking

The Middle East is entering a new era, both daunting and hopeful, but the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has slipped into the background. Thanks to Olive Tree scholarships some young Palestinians and Israelis have been able to take time out to study for degrees at City University. While doing so, they can speak to each other in ways not possible ‘at home’. The Olive Tree Middle East Forum has brought together an unusual panel to ask what difference this experience can make for those otherwise unable to talk across the conflict divide.

On the panel:

**Damian Gorman** has been a writer and encourager of other people's writing for more than 25 years. He was founding director of An Crann/The Tree, a charity which worked to help “tell, and hear, the stories of Northern Ireland’s Troubles through the arts” from 1994 to 2001. His work has garnered awards as diverse as a Better Ireland Award and an MBE.

**Dr Anton Obholzer** is a Fellow of the Royal College of Psychiatrists and a Member of the British Psychoanalytical Society. He was for many years Head of the Tavistock centre London. He is an experienced international organizational consultant presently linked with the French International Business School (INSEAD) global leadership centre. His particular interest is in change and resistance to change in organizations.

Together with Palestinian and Israeli Students awarded Olive Tree Scholarships to study for undergraduate degrees at City University.

**Date:** Wednesday 8 February 2012  
**Time:** 6 – 7:30pm  
**Location:** A130, College Building,  
280 St John Street, London EC1V 4PB

To register, no charge, please contact: olivetree@city.ac.uk  
For more about The Olive Tree Programme see: www.city.ac.uk/olivetree